



Tab III: HOUSING DESIGN CRITERIA

The Harris County Community Services Department (HCCSD) uses standards of design and construction to implement its programs in order to develop safe housing that will serve the needs of its inhabitants with as much quality, energy efficiency, durability, comfort, and environmental sustainability as the marketplace, resources, and need will permit. All housing design and construction shall be performed in accordance with these standards and criteria. The criteria in this report are in addition to all applicable federal, state, and local codes, laws, and regulations. These criteria are not intended to reduce or circumvent the requirements of law and current applicable building codes. Some of these standards are general and are intended to be guidelines that must be applied to the local situation. Although these apply primarily to new construction, they also apply to the rehabilitation of existing structures where practicable or directly stated. These standards/criteria may be modified only where the particular characteristics of the site or other local conditions make compliance impractical or undesirable. Such modification may be required by HCCSD or requested by the applicant and accepted by HCCSD. When such modifications are made, additional requirements may be imposed by HCCSD. Applicants of HCCSD funding should also note the Minimum Property Standards under Tab IV for detailed requirements for construction/rehabilitation projects.

3.1 Site Design Principles

In evaluating the suitability and design minimums of a site, HCCSD considers a number of criteria. A site should not be selected where the surroundings will detract excessively from the quality of development upon it, where the development may have an adverse effect upon its surrounding or where the location may reduce the quality of life to the residents. This can be done by considering issues such as lot orientation, storm-water management, access to transit, and proximity to community amenities (commercial, social services, education, and healthcare facilities).

Building Placement

Buildings shall be planned and located so that the spaces between them become positive elements in the site plan and not just leftover portions of the site which happens not to be occupied by buildings. In this way, land which is defined by natural or man-made features and developed purposefully, will contribute to the lives of the inhabitants by permitting fuller use and enjoyment of a site, by adding to the sense of belonging and pride among the residents, by offering increased privacy, and by decreasing maintenance needs. The proposed building placement should respect the orientation of surrounding buildings, existing pedestrian paths and sidewalks, and the orientation of surrounding streets. The proposed building should respect the climatic conditions by minimizing heat gain and considering the impact of shade on adjacent land uses and areas.



Buildings should be oriented to allow for the use of common driveways, especially along arterials streets, where a reduction in the number of curb openings will enhance the streetscape and promote traffic safety and improved mobility.

If within a city boundary, the building should follow local regulations and ordinances governing set-backs and building orientation. New housing units constructed within existing neighborhoods should follow those neighborhood's Homeowner Association rules where they exist. Buildings shall where possible align with the front edge of existing buildings along a street. At a corner, buildings shall be placed to align with existing buildings facing both streets. On blocks without existing buildings, new buildings shall be placed in accordance with other buildings on adjacent blocks.

Street Boundaries and Sidewalks

The public (sidewalk edge) boundary of the property shall be defined using fencing, walls, hedges, line of trees, or other landscape material. For new housing units constructed within existing neighborhoods with sidewalks, the new units should have sidewalks that connect to the existing sidewalk network. Sidewalks should be made comfortable for use by pedestrians through the use of landscaping, overhangs and canopies in order to provide shade and non-heat absorbing materials. Handicapped access must be incorporated in all required access sidewalks/pathways.

Site Density

The design and building of each project must be to the density specific for the location type. Due to the diversity of unincorporated Harris County, proposed projects will be categorized as urban/ small city requiring a minimum of at least 75% of surrounding net residential density, suburban/mid-size town requiring a minimum of at least 75% of surrounding net residential density or rural/small towns requiring a minimum net density of 5 units per acre for detached or semi-detached houses; 10 units per acre for townhomes and 15 units per acre for apartments.

Open Space

Private usable open space should be directly accessible from the individual dwelling and be of such size as to offer a reasonable outdoor living opportunity. The placement of air conditioning equipment should not render private open space unusable.

Specific to Multi-unit Developments

Set aside a minimum of 10% of the total project acreage as open space for use by residents or locate project within a .25 mile walk distance of dedicated public open space that is a minimum of .75 acres (not an option for senior developments). Private and common open spaces should be designed to be accessible and usable by occupants of the development. Functional open space enhances circulation within a site and contributes to the site's aesthetic qualities.



Common areas should be accessible from all buildings and connected by a comprehensive, on-site pedestrian circulation system. Public open space recreation areas, plazas and courtyards should be located and landscaped to take advantage of solar orientation, provide protection from prevailing wind, and to afford summer shade and winter sunshine. Mechanical units should be screened from view.

Parking and Traffic Circulation

Number of parking space should be made available to accommodate the household number of the single family unit project according to the size of the unit or the number of units in a multifamily housing project. Parking areas should be buffered from adjacent residential properties. Access drives, internal circulation drives, parking areas, and pedestrian walkways should be designed to provide safety and convenience for both motorist and pedestrians and ensure access for the physically disabled. Surface parking design should utilize shared access drives with adjacent, similarly zoned properties to reduce interference with pedestrians. The number of curb cuts should be minimized and pedestrian access enhanced. Pavement materials should be chosen to minimize reflected light and glare. Each parking space shall be independently accessible and have a vertical clearance of not less than 7.5 feet.

Parking and circulation aisles should be perpendicular to the entry faces of buildings to minimize conflicting movements by pedestrians and vehicles.

Landscaping and Trees

Landscaping shall complement the building, maximize the use of open space and provide plants such that at least 50% of the area available for landscaping is planted with native or adaptive species. Landscaping on larger projects should be compatible with the neighborhood, provide an important visual amenity to the residents and provide adequate dedicated space for children to play. In addition the landscape elements should be designed to reduce the heat island effect, assist in storm water management of the site and reduce the overall irrigation water demand and water budget.

New landscaping materials and vegetation should conform to a low maintenance landscaping methods and should consider integration with the stormwater management plan to provide water and drainage that is complimentary with plants. Root structures shall be considered for their required space, effects on nearby pavements and foundations, and possible interference with subsurface utilities. Plants shall be sized according to proper planting practice and shall be adequate to withstand normal use. Turfgrass is highly effective in control of environmental pollution, such as the suppression of dust, glare, and noise, and in heat dissipation. Turf should include the use of grass varieties that are drought resistant and native to the area. Existing mature and healthy trees shall be preserved wherever possible. For information on turfgrasses and landscaping in Texas, applicants should consult the Texas AgriLife Extension Services (<http://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/>).



Fencing

All single family housing and multifamily housing shall be defined with a fence. Fencing material and height should match or complement fencing in the neighborhood and development. For more information, see the Minimum Property Standards section under Tab IV.

Lighting

Security lighting should be provided to help ensure a safe environment. Exterior lighting should be designed to coordinate with the building architecture and landscaping. Security and parking lot lights, and lighting for signs shall be shielded or otherwise designed to ensure that light is directed downward and not onto adjacent properties. Lights shall not shine intensely upon windows of housing dwellings. The type of light source used should be consistent throughout a project.

Signage

Permanent property signage should be made of quality construction from materials consistent with those used in the construction of the main property. In the case of multi-family complexes with more than one building, signage must be included that identifies the building's number and is visible from roadway. Signage should be directional but non-intrusive and scaled in proportion to the proposed property.

In addition to property signage, a permanent bronze plaque must be installed at main entrance prior to construction completion according to HCCSD specifications.

3.2 Exterior Design Principles

Building Entrances and Porches

New residential entrances shall be raised above the sidewalk to provide a sense of separation between public and private spaces or to be similar to other properties in the neighborhood. Natural surveillance shall be used to discourage crime (i.e., entrances, parking, and walkways shall be visible from inside units and the street). Units requiring accessibility are to develop site-grading strategies using 1:20 walkways and ramps. Ramps in one and two family construction are to be limited to no greater than 30 feet.

Front porches for single family housing are required in neighborhoods where existing houses have front porches and encouraged in others. Porches for multi-family projects will be reviewed for neighborhood compatibility.

Building Materials and Exterior Details

Materials selected for construction must be durable, healthy and safe, cost effective (both in the short and long term) and efficient in Harris County's range of weather conditions. An investment in higher quality green materials may affect the total up front project cost but will ensure long term financial benefits, as reflected in lower operating expenditures. At minimum, new building materials visible from the public streets shall be of equal quality or better than



materials on existing buildings in the neighborhood or on the existing building. Final exterior building elevations shall have exterior details of quality and dimension equal to or better than existing buildings in the neighborhood. Damaged exterior details shall be rebuilt or replaced. In the design of new units, exterior details shall carefully consider function and materials consistent or better than the character and quality of the existing area and maintenance cost to the resident. Where applicable, exterior design and materials should be windstorm resistant per the Texas Department of Insurance Windstorm Resistant Construction Code (See www.tdi.state.tx.us).

3.3 Interior Design and Livability

Layout of buildings and units should meet the following general principles:

- Circulation space shall be designed efficiently and kept to a minimum.
- Avoid plumbing on exterior walls.
- Bathrooms shall not open onto living/dining spaces.
- Coat closets shall be located near dwelling entrances.
- Access to rooms shall be from circulation spaces and not directly through the kitchen.
- Window location shall provide for cross ventilation in rooms (where possible) and through units.
- Building shall provide visual and noise barriers between public and private spaces.
- Storage space shall be adequate.

Multifamily Housing

The following discusses the requirement for new construction and in some cases rehabilitation and conversion of multifamily housing. Of note, new construction of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) is not an eligible unit type under the Harris County Housing program. The county encourages the new construction of, at minimum, efficiency units.

Minimum Unit Size

The square footage of all of the units in the development, for each type of unit, must be at minimum:

Housing Unit Type	Minimum Square Footage
SRO‡	350 square feet
Efficiency	400 square feet
One Bedroom	650 square feet / *550 square feet
Two Bedroom	900 square feet / *750 square feet
Three Bedroom	1000 square feet

(*) Pertains to federally assisted units for the elderly and formerly homeless individuals

(‡) Note: New construction of SRO units is not eligible under the Harris County CSD housing program. See Section 3.4 Special Needs Housing for more information.

For SRO and Efficiency unit type square footage, occupancies are for two or less persons. For one and two bedroom units, 550 and 750 square feet per unit, respectively, is



acceptable for federally assisted units for elderly and formerly homeless individuals only. Federally assisted projects serving formerly homeless families must meet the larger minimum square footage requirements.

Minimum Acceptable Standards

For more information, see the Minimum Property Standards section in Tab IV.

Single Family Housing

The following discusses the requirement for new construction and in some cases rehabilitation.

Unit Size

The square footage and bathroom requirements for each unit type must be at minimum:

Number of Bedrooms	Minimum Square Footage	Minimum Number Bathrooms
Two Bedroom	1,000 square feet	One full bathroom
Three Bedroom	1,200 square feet	One and half bathrooms
Four Bedroom	1,400 square feet	Two full bathrooms

Minimum Acceptable Standards

For more information, see the Minimum Property Standards section in Tab IV.

3.4 SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing may be any type of rental housing, including SRO housing and group homes, that is designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to persons (including, among others, deinstitutionalized individuals with disabilities, homeless individuals with disabilities, and homeless families with children), and has as its purpose facilitating the transition of individuals and families to independent living within a time period set by the participating jurisdiction or project owner before occupancy. Eligible transitional housing projects for HCCSD funding include rehabilitation of existing transitional housing units and conversion of existing buildings to transitional housing. New construction of transitional housing will only be funded by HCCSD when new units are replacing existing units in substandard condition.

Transitional housing is governed by the program rules that apply to the type of housing unit assisted (i.e., SRO unit, group housing unit, or traditional housing unit). However, unlike permanent housing, tenancy may terminate upon completion of the transitional period, which is limited to 24 months. At least 30 days before the end of the transitional housing tenancy period, the owner is required to provide the tenant with written notice that the tenancy period is ending. The transitional housing operator is required by HCCSD to have written policies and



procedures for the operations of the facility, which should include but is not limited to policies and procedures for tenant selection and homelessness documentation, in-take, tenant agreements, termination, facility rules, rent, and transition plans to permanent housing. In no cases shall residents of transitional housing be discharged into homelessness.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO)

Single Room Occupancy housing is housing consisting of single-room dwelling units that are the primary residence of its occupant or occupants. The new construction of SRO units is not eligible under the Harris County CSD housing program. If the SRO project involves conversion of non-residential space, or reconstruction, each unit must contain either food preparation or sanitary facilities (and may contain both). If the project involves acquisition and or rehabilitation of an existing residential structure or hotel, neither food preparation nor sanitary facilities are required to be in the units, but are encouraged. If the units do not contain sanitary facilities, the building must contain sanitary facilities that are shared by tenants. If the units do not contain food preparation facilities, an explanation of where tenants will access food or food preparation facilities will be required. SRO does not include facilities for students.

The maximum per-unit subsidy limits under 92.250 are the set for zero-bedroom units; however, in no event may the maximum subsidy exceed the actual development cost of the units based on their proportionate share of the total development cost.

If a SRO unit has neither food preparation nor sanitary facilities, or only one, the rent may not exceed 75 percent of the FMR for a zero-bedroom unit. The “lesser of” rule comparing the FMR to 30 percent of 65 percent of area median income and Low HOME rents do not apply in this circumstance. For an SRO with both food and sanitary facilities contained within the unit, the standards set forth in Section 92.252 relative to High and Low HOME rents apply. HOME rents include utilities but not the cost of supportive services.

Group Housing

A Group Home is a single dwelling unit, usually with multiple bedrooms, that is occupied by two or more single persons or families consisting of common space and/or facilities for group use by the occupants of the unit. Except in the case of a 1-bedroom group home, a group home provides separate private space for each occupant or family. It also includes group housing for elderly or disabled persons. Supportive services may be provided. In all cases, a group home must meet the definition of “housing”.

The entire project is considered a single unit for determination of maximum HOME subsidy limits 92.250. The subsidy limit is based on the number of bedrooms in the unit.

Rents in group homes are based on the appropriate Section 8 Existing Housing Fair Market Rent (FMR) for the unit size. For example, a group home with four bedrooms would use the FMR for a four-bedroom unit. Each family’s rent will be its proportionate share of the total unit rent. Rent includes utilities and because a group home is a single unit, there is no low HOME rent.



NOTE: Live in supportive service provider bedrooms are not counted in calculating tenants' rent. For example, if one bedroom of a four-bedroom unit is occupied by a service provide, the maximum unit rent is the FMR for a three bedroom unit.